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FOR CONGRESSWOMAN NITA LOWEY FROM AMBASSADOR AGUIRRE
H FOR CHERITH NORMAN
H PLEASE PASS LTCOL BARBARA JORGENSEN

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SUBJECT: SPAIN WELCOMES CODEL LOWEY

Classified By: Amb. Eduardo Aguirre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) Dear Madame Chairwoman: I welcome you to Spain on behalf of our 367 American and Spanish colleagues serving the United States at Mission Spain. In addition to being a beautiful, historic and culturally rich nation, Spain is a valued U.S. partner and an important geostrategic player. Spain has achieved a remarkable transformation since the end of dictatorship 30 years ago. It is one of the leading democracies in Europe and has the eighth-largest economy in the world. I hope you and your delegation will enjoy your stay.

//POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP//

12. (C) Spain cooperates closely with the U.S. in the areas of counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, military and defense programs, non-proliferation, and Latin America. Spain is an important NATO ally, a key player in the European Union, and currently holds the rotating presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Though it removed its troops from Iraq in 2004 shortly after President Zapatero's unexpected election, Spain has contributed \$22 million to the construction of a children's hospital in Basrah, Iraq in 2006, continues to fulfill a \$300 million pledge for reconstruction in Iraq and recently pledged an additional \$28 million to the effort. Spain has made a strong, long-term commitment to NATO's mission in Afghanistan, where it has 690 soldiers deployed to the Badghis Provincial Reconstruction Team and Forward Support Base; it has also contributed 150 million euros to Afghan reconstruction. Spain has deployed 1100 soldiers to Lebanon, where they lead a multi-national brigade of UN peacekeeping forces (UNIFIL) assigned to the volatile tri-border region between Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Recently, a terrorist strike killed six members of the Spanish UNIFIL contingent. Spain further supports U.S. strategic interests by allowing the U.S. to share two important Spanish bases, Rota Naval Station and Moron Air Force Base, in Southern Spain, as well as providing blanket flight and overflight clearances. The 1500 U.S. military personnel at the two bases support thousands of U.S. military flights and hundreds of U.S. ship visits each year. Continued use of these bases is essential to U.S. operations from the Mediterranean all the way to Afghanistan.

13. (U) Spanish interest in Africa is increasing, as is Spanish assistance to African nations, primarily in West Africa and the Sahel. Over the past several years, Sub-Saharan African migrants have been traveling by sea to the Canary Islands or over land to the Moroccan Coast in an attempt to gain entry into Spain and the European Union. In 2006, over 30,000 Sub-Saharan Africans migrated to the Canary Islands by boat. It is impossible to estimate how many have

perished during the risky voyage, as boats have veered off course and headed into the North Atlantic or capsized in West African waters. Spain has opened several new Embassies in West Africa and is also seeking to implement guest worker programs to promote legal migration. Along with other EU Mediterranean nations, principally Portugal, Italy, France and Malta, Spain is trying to push the EU to increase maritime patrolling and counter-immigration efforts along the EU's southern border. Spain will always be a secondary player to the French and British in Africa, but it has increasing economic and security interests there and is keen on maintaining stability in that part of the world.

¶4. (U) In addition, our economic relationship with Spain is strong and mutually beneficial. The Spanish economy has boomed in the last decade as a result of structural reforms, EU aid, and membership in the Euro zone. The commercial relationship is dominated by a very strong U.S. direct investment presence, although two-way trade remains a relatively minor percentage of each country's exports and imports. Many of the U.S. Fortune 100 firms are present and doing well. The American Chamber of Commerce estimates that about five percent of Spain's annual GDP is derived from U.S. investment. In recent years, U.S. portfolio investors have bought significant shares in major Spanish firms. Spanish firms have rediscovered America and are now investing in the United States, especially in the banking and renewable energy sectors, and Spanish construction companies have also won important contracts in the U.S.

//CHALLENGES//

¶5. (C) The Spanish government maintains a policy of engagement with certain governments that we feel is counterproductive, including Cuba, Syria and Iran.

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Additionally, President Zapatero has at times pursued a foreign policy agenda tailored more toward domestic electoral politics than a commitment to shared transatlantic principles. We would like the Spanish to increase their troop commitment in Afghanistan. We would also like Spain to maintain support for Kosovo's independence although this is a sensitive issue for them due to their own complex federal vs. regional struggle. Spain's Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is particularly sensitive and important at present given the increasingly complicated relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO.

//THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT//

¶6. (C) President Zapatero will face reelection in March 2008 at the latest. His governing Spanish Socialist Workers Party currently holds control of Parliament and several local and regional governments, while the opposition conservative People's Party (PP) maintains control over several urban centers, including the all-important Madrid mayorship and governorship. While anything can change between now and next March, most local pundits are predicting the reelection of Zapatero, due mainly to the inability of PP leader Mariano Rajoy to galvanize and energize the Spanish population beyond his center-right base. Should Zapatero win reelection, he will become the elder statesman among the EU's big five (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain) and will become an even greater hero to European socialists than he already is. Key factors which could influence the electoral outcome are the potential for a slowing economy (based on an over-inflated real estate and construction sector), as well as the impact of any terrorist attacks (which changed the course of the 2004 national elections). Spanish foreign policy is primarily pacifist, although the Spanish military strongly supports the United States. The Zapatero government feels much more comfortable committing troops to peacekeeping operations than to combat.

//THE HUMAN ELEMENT//

¶7. (U) Public opinion of the United States is lower in Spain than any other European nation, in part because Spain's 20th century experience (a bloody civil war, lengthy isolated dictatorship, neutrality in the World Wars and recent transition to democracy) is different from that shared by the U.S. and other Western European allies. While the political relationship between Washington and Madrid has been erratic at times over the past 4 years, the populations of both nations remain keenly interested in the culture and customs of the other. A tremendous number of American college students undertake foreign-study terms in Spain, and Spain is the number one destination for U.S. tourists in Europe. Spanish retail clothing sensation Zara enjoys a growing popularity in the United States. Spaniards meanwhile continue to be fascinated by American music, films and television; Spain has also become one of the world's powerhouse basketball nations (the reigning World Champions). Many Spaniards have traveled to or studied in the United States, although English speakers are not in great supply.

//SEVILLA//

¶8. (U) Sevilla dates to Roman times, though it was not a major city until the end of the Cordoba Caliphate in the 11th century. Sevilla emerged as a major power center of the Moorish presence in Spain until 1248, when Ferdinand III definitively recaptured the city. Sevilla enjoyed global prominence and tremendous wealth after Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492 when it was granted total control of the trade relationship with the Spanish colonies. As the Spanish empire declined, so too did Sevilla, facing several plagues and the loss of control of the new world commercial relationship. Its fortunes revived in the late 20th century, when Sevillian Felipe Gonzalez was elected the first Socialist president of Spain. Sevilla hosted the 1992 Expo world fair, marking 500 years since Columbus' voyage, and has become an increasingly popular tourist and student destination ever since.

¶9. (U) The most interesting sites in Sevilla are the Cathedral which dates to the 16th century and the adjoining "Giralda" minaret which dates to the 12th century. Although the Cathedral claims to be the burial place of Christopher Columbus, there is no historical agreement on this point. The Giralda affords great views of the city, although the walk to the top of the tower is not for the faint of heart. Also of interest is the "Alcazar" (palace/castle) near the Cathedral, parts of which date to the 10th century. The main

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pastime in Sevilla, however, is simply enjoying the Andalusian cuisine, wandering the narrow streets, and appreciating the historic architecture, as well as frequenting the extensive labyrinth of pedestrian shopping boulevards. August is the hottest month of the year in Sevilla, with temperatures sometimes reaching above 100 in the afternoon.

//SECURITY ASSESSMENT//

¶10. (U) In general, Spain is safe. However, Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla and other large cities in Spain attract a large number of criminals and pickpockets and frequent incidents of crime of opportunity against the unwary do occur. Carry only essential items including a photocopy of your passport's photo page. Visitors can protect themselves against crime by being street-smart, alert and aware of their surroundings. In the event you are victimized by crime, or experience any security-related incident, please contact the Embassy's Regional Security Office at 91-587-2550 or after hours at 91-587-2355. Official visitors to the Embassy in Madrid or the Consulate General in Barcelona are encouraged to receive a security briefing from the RSO office at their earliest convenience. Additional information regarding

safety and security in Spain is available on the U.S.
Department of State's website (www.embusa.es).

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AGUIRRE